



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Washington DC 20420

July 7, 2011

The Honorable Ted Poe
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Poe:

Thank you for your letter dated June 29, 2011, regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Houston National Cemetery. Secretary Shinseki is on VA-related travel this week and has asked that I respond on his behalf.

VA understands the concerns you raised about the Houston National Cemetery. We take seriously all matters such as these that are brought to our attention. We will review all allegations and take any needed actions to verify that all procedures and processes are being followed. VA policy in no way precludes religious expressions offered during interments at national cemeteries that are in keeping with the wishes of the families of the deceased. Families decide whether and what type of religious service will take place. That is a matter strictly between them and the clergy they select to preside at the services.

On advice of the Department of Justice, VA is currently unable to comment specifically on certain aspects of the litigation in question. Let me emphasize, however, that we care deeply that the First Amendment rights of the families of those patriots who are interred in our national cemeteries, and the rights of all who visit these national shrines, are fully respected. I will be pleased to provide you the Government's answer to the complaint when it is filed later this month.

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) has a nationwide reputation for excellence and top-rated customer satisfaction. For the past 10 years, NCA has earned the American Customer Satisfaction Index's rating as the top-performing public or private organization in the country. We take seriously our sacred trust to honor all those we serve.

I hope this information is helpful to you. Thank you for your support of our mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John R. Gingrich".

John R. Gingrich
Chief of Staff